



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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Bob Walker 202-208-6416

Craig Rieben 202-208-5634

**SECRETARY BABBITT, ALASKA NATIVES SIGN AGREEMENT
TO PROTECT BEAR, SALMON HABITAT ON KODIAK ISLAND**

Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt today signed agreements with the presidents of two Alaska Native corporations to protect more than 150,000 acres of prime habitat for bear, salmon, bald eagles and other species on Kodiak Island.

"These agreements will preserve important habitat, provide additional opportunities for hunting, subsistence, commercial and sport fishing, and other outdoor activities, and strengthen the local economy on Kodiak Island," Secretary Babbitt said. "This is a tremendous victory for the salmon, bears and the people of the villages and the Kodiak region. It is an important milestone in the Exxon-Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council restoration program to heal the wounds from the 1989 disaster.

"President Roosevelt established Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge a half-century ago, the Eisenhower Administration enlarged it in the 1950s, and now, in keeping with President Clinton's commitment to protect the environment and provide economic opportunities for Native peoples, we are taking another step in preserving this national natural treasure," Secretary Babbitt noted.

Emil Christiansen, President of Old Harbor Native Corporation, and Ralph Eluska, President of Akhiok-Kaguyak, Inc., signed for their corporations. Secretary Babbitt, Assistant Secretary George T. Frampton, Jr. and Mollie Beattie, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, represented the Department at today's ceremony.

Together, the agreements protect about 152,000 acres of land in perpetuity for a total cost of \$60.5 million, to be paid from Exxon-Valdez oil spill settlement funds.

The agreement with Akhiok-Kaguyak, Inc., includes the purchase of the surface title to approximately 77,000 acres and strict conservation easements on another 43,000 acres, for a total of some 120,000 acres to be protected in perpetuity at a cost of \$46 million.

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The agreement with the Old Harbor Native Corporation includes surface title to about 29,000 acres and conservation easements on 3,000 acres, a total of approximately 32,000 acres to be protected in perpetuity at a cost of \$14.5 million.

In addition, as part of the agreement, the Old Harbor Native Corporation will preserve 65,000 acres of land on nearby Sitkalidak Island as a private wildlife refuge, for eco-tourism and other appropriate economic uses consistent with perpetuating Sitkalidak's highly significant fish, wildlife and wilderness values.

The two Native Alaskan village corporations will retain some land around the villages to allow for continued hunting and fishing activities for subsistence, to preserve traditions, and for economic development purposes. The sport, commercial and subsistence value of the salmon originating from the streams and lakes of the acquired lands and the recreational activities that occur on them are highly significant to the local economy.

The agreement will help implement the Final Restoration Plan of November 1994, which is designed to help guide efforts to restore natural resources injured by the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound and the northern Gulf of Alaska. It is the largest land acquisition for the Federal Government through the use of settlement funds.

Representatives of the Interior Department currently are working with another Native Alaska corporation, Koniag, Inc., to finalize an agreement to provide various levels of protection for another 120,000 acres within the refuge. This would bring the total to 270,000 acres protected under three agreements.

The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, consisting of three federal and three state representatives, administers the \$900 million civil settlement reached in 1991 with the Exxon Corporation. The 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill injured local populations of sea birds, salmon and marine mammals. The two agreements signed today are designed to protect important habitat for species injured by spill, including pink salmon, sockeye salmon, pacific herring, bald eagles, river otter, sea otters, marbled murrelets, harlequin ducks, pigeon guillemots and harbor seals.

The agreements are the result of a strong partnership involving the Interior Department, State of Alaska, the Kodiak Island Borough and the villages of Old Harbor and Akhiok-Kaguyak.

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The agreements also complement the State of Alaska's recent acquisition of lands on Afognak Island, which is north of Kodiak Island in the Kodiak archipelago, and within the boundary of Kachemak Bay State Park on the Kenai Peninsula.

To further complement the agreements and the restoration program, the Department has requested \$1.5 million in FY1996 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to purchase additional habitat within the boundaries of the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge. If approved by Congress, these funds would provide additional access opportunities for hunting, fishing and other types of recreation in the refuge.

Upon final closing of the sales, the lands, which are within the boundaries of Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge, will be added to that refuge. National wildlife refuges are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior.



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Facts

U.S. Department of the Interior

KODIAK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge by Executive Order, following the recommendation of Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. President Roosevelt established the refuge, ". . . for the purpose of protecting the natural feeding and breeding range of the brown bears and other wildlife on Uganik and Kodiak Islands, Alaska."

Sport hunting groups, led by the Boone and Crockett Club, lobbied to establish the refuge in order to protect the local population of brown bear. The Boone and Crockett Club was created by Theodore Roosevelt.

In 1958, the Eisenhower Administration expanded the refuge boundary to further protect fish and wildlife habitat on the island.

In 1971, Congress passed the Alaskan Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) which created Native Alaskan village corporations. ANCSA also authorized village corporations to select nearby lands to extinguish aboriginal land claims. On Kodiak, Native corporations were entitled to select 310,000 acres within the boundary of the refuge.

In 1980 the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act (ANILCA) added additional lands to the refuge and further expanded on the mission of the refuge to:

- Conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, Kodiak brown bears, salmonids, sea otters, sea lions and other marine mammals, and migratory birds
- Fulfill international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife
- Provide opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents consistent with the primary purposes of the refuge
- Ensure the maintenance of water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge to conserve populations and habitats in their natural diversity.

In addition to protecting habitat for species injured by the 1989 oil spill, the wildlife resources on the refuge include:

Brown Bear - Subspecies *Ursus arctos middendorffi* found only on Kodiak archipelago. Kodiak Island population, estimated at 2,500 to 3,000 animals, includes some of the highest known densities of brown bear in the world.

Salmon - All five Pacific salmon (king [chinook], red [sockeye], pink [humpback], chum [dog], and silver [coho]) are important sportfish species. Up to 70 percent of salmon taken commercially in the Kodiak area come from refuge-based stocks.

Bald Eagle - More than 400 nesting pairs.

Marine Mammals - gray, sei, fin, minke, killer, and humpback whales; harbor seal; Steller's sea lion; sea otter; Dall and harbor porpoises.

Seabirds and Waterfowl - 1.5 million seabirds in more than 140 colonies and 150,000 ducks and geese overwinter on Kodiak bays, inlets, and shores.

Native Land Mammals (6 species) - brown bear, short-tailed weasel, river otter, tundra vole, little brown bat, red fox.

Introduced Land Mammals - include Sitka black-tailed deer (1920s), beaver, mountain goat, snowshoe hare, Roosevelt elk (Afognak Island).

All Birds - More than 225 sighted species (including seabirds and waterfowl).

Other Sportfish - Arctic char, Dolly Varden, rainbow trout, and steelhead. The Ayakulik River is one of the state's top king salmon, silver salmon and steelhead sportfishing rivers.

Native Villages

Akhiok - Located at the southwestern end of Kodiak Island at Alitak Bay. Economy is based primarily on fishing. Population in 1994 was 86.

Old Harbor - Located on the southern coast of Kodiak Island. Also thought to be inhabited nearly 2,000 years, and currently oriented around commercial fishing. Population in 1994 was 311.